

188,000 under evacuation orders near Northern California dam

February 13 2017, by Olga R. Rodriguez And Don Thompson



Kendra Curieo waits in traffic to evacuate Marysville, Calif., Sunday, Feb. 12, 2017. Thousands of residents of Marysville and other Northern California communities were told to leave their homes Sunday evening as an emergency spillway of the Oroville Dam could fail at any time unleashing flood waters from Lake Oroville, according to officials from the California Department of Water Resources. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

At least 188,000 people remain under evacuation orders after Northern California authorities warned an emergency spillway in the country's tallest dam was in danger of failing Sunday and unleashing uncontrolled

flood waters on towns below.

About 150 miles northeast of San Francisco, Lake Oroville is one of California's largest man-made lakes, and the 770-foot-tall Oroville Dam is the nation's tallest.

The evacuation was ordered Sunday afternoon after engineers spotted erosion on the dam's secondary spillway. Hours later, panicked and angry people were sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic trying to leave the area.

"The police came and told us to evacuate," said Kaysi Levias who was with her husband, Greg, at a gas station as they attempted to flee.

Officials warned residents that the spillway could fail within an hour.

"I'm just shocked," Greg Levias said. "Pretty mad."

"Not giving us more warning," said Kaysi, finishing his sentence.

"We've never been through this before," said Kaysi Levias. "We have two boys and our dog. All the stuff we could fit in the trunk—clothes and blankets."

What they couldn't fit they piled as high as they could in their downstairs Yuba City apartment and joined the line of traffic attempting to leave the city where they had moved just three weeks ago.



In this Saturday, Feb. 11, 2017, photo, Jason Newton, of the Department of Water Resources, takes a picture of water going over the emergency spillway at Oroville Dam in Oroville, Calif. Officials have ordered residents near the Oroville Dam in Northern California to evacuate the area Sunday, Feb. 12, saying a "hazardous situation is developing" after an emergency spillway severely eroded. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

The cities of Oroville, Gridley, Live Oak, Marysville, Wheatland, Yuba City, Plumas Lake, and Olivehurst were all under evacuation orders.

State Fire and Rescue Chief Kim Zagaris spoke at a news conference late Sunday and said at least 250 law enforcement officers from throughout the state are in the area or en route to help the people evacuating.

The evacuation order went out around 4 p.m. after engineers spotted a hole that was eroding back toward the top of the spillway.

The erosion at the head of the emergency spillway threatens to undermine the concrete weir and allow large, uncontrolled releases of [water](#) from Lake Oroville, the California Department of Water Resources said. Those potential flows could overwhelm the Feather River and other downstream waterways, channels and levees.

Officials say Oroville Lake levels had decreased by Sunday night as they let water flow from its heavily damaged main spillway. Late Sunday, officials noted that water levels had lowered enough that water was no longer spilling over the eroded area.



In this Saturday, Feb. 11, 2017, water flows down Oroville Dam's main spillway near Oroville, Calif. Officials have ordered residents near the Oroville Dam in Northern California to evacuate the area Sunday, Feb. 12, saying a "hazardous situation is developing" after an emergency spillway severely eroded. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea said engineers with the Department of

Water Resources informed him shortly after 6 p.m. that the erosion on the emergency spillway at the Oroville Dam was not advancing as fast as they thought.

"Unfortunately they couldn't advise me or tell me specifically how much time that would take so we had to make the very difficult and critical decision to initiate the evacuation of the Orville area and all locations south of that," he said. "We needed to get people moving quickly to save lives if the worst case scenario came into fruition."

Honea said there was a plan to plug the hole by using helicopters to drop rocks into the crevasse. But a state water official said at a news conference that no repair work was done after officials looked at the flow and available resources.

Acting Director Department of Water Resources Bill Croyle said officials will be able to assess the damage to the emergency spillway now that the water is no longer spilling over the top.

Water began flowing over the emergency spillway at the Oroville Dam in Northern California on Saturday for the first time in its nearly 50-year history after heavy rainfall. Officials earlier Sunday stressed the dam itself was structurally sound and said there was no threat to the public.



In this Saturday, Feb. 11, 2017, water flows down Oroville Dam's main spillway, near Oroville, Calif. Officials have ordered residents near the Oroville Dam in Northern California to evacuate the area Sunday, Feb. 12, saying a "hazardous situation is developing" after an emergency spillway severely eroded. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

Residents of Oroville, a town of 16,000 people, should head north toward Chico, and other cities should follow orders from their local law enforcement agencies, the Butte County Sheriff's office said.

The Yuba County Office of Emergency Services asked residents in the valley floor, including Marysville, a city of 12,000 people, to evacuate and take routes to the east, south, or west and avoid traveling north toward Oroville.

The California Department of Water Resources said it is releasing as much as 100,000 cubic feet per second from the main, heavily damaged spillway to try to drain the lake.

Department engineer and spokesman Kevin Dossey told the Sacramento

The emergency spillway was rated to handle 250,000 cubic feet per second, but it began to show weakness Sunday at a small fraction of that. Flows through the spillway peaked at 12,600 cubic feet per second at 1 a.m. Sunday and were down to 8,000 cubic feet per second by midday.

Unexpected erosion chewed through the main spillway during heavy rain earlier this week, sending chunks of concrete flying and creating a 200-foot-long, 30-foot-deep hole that continues growing. Engineers don't know what caused the cave-in, but Chris Orrock, a spokesman for the state Department of Water Resources, said it appears the dam's main spillway has stopped crumbling even though it's being used for water releases.



A driver waits in traffic to evacuate Marysville, Calif., Sunday, Feb. 12, 2017. Thousands of residents of Marysville and other Northern California communities were told to leave their homes Sunday evening as an emergency spillway of the Oroville Dam could fail at any time unleashing flood waters from Lake Oroville, according to officials from the California Department of Water Resources. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

The lake is a central piece of California's government-run water delivery network, supplying water for agriculture in the Central Valley and residents and businesses in Southern California.



California Highway Patrol officer Ken Weckman directs traffic as residents evacuate Marysville, Calif., Sunday, Feb. 12, 2017. Thousands of residents of Marysville and other Northern California communities were told to leave their homes Sunday evening as an emergency spillway of the Oroville Dam could fail at any time unleashing flood waters from Lake Oroville, according to officials from the California Department of Water Resources. (Paul Kitagaki Jr./The Sacramento Bee via AP)



This Feb. 11, 2017, photo released by the California Department of Water Resources shows the main spillway, bottom, and an auxiliary spillway, upper, of the Oroville Dam at Lake Oroville in Oroville, Calif. Water will continue to flow over the emergency spillway at the nation's tallest dam for another day or so, officials said Sunday. (Albert Madrid/California Department of Water Resources via AP)



This Saturday, Feb. 11, 2017, aerial photo released by the California Department of Water Resources shows the damaged spillway with eroded hillside in Oroville, Calif. Water will continue to flow over an emergency spillway at the nation's tallest dam for another day or so, officials said Sunday. (William Croyle/California Department of Water Resources via AP)



In this Saturday, Feb. 11, 2017, photo, water flows down Oroville Dam's main spillway, in Oroville, Calif. Officials have ordered residents near the Oroville Dam in Northern California to evacuate the area Sunday, Feb. 12, saying a "hazardous situation is developing" after an emergency spillway severely eroded. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)



In this Feb. 11, 2017, photo released by the California Department of Water Resources, water flows over an emergency spillway at the Oroville Dam at Lake Oroville in Oroville, Calif. Water will continue to flow over the emergency spillway at the nation's tallest dam for another day or so, officials said Sunday. (Albert Madrid/California Department of Water Resources via AP)

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